

SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE



3 2449 0468491 8



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
Lyrasis Members and Sloan Foundation

<http://www.archive.org/details/beautynotfoundbe00spei>

The Beauty Not Found Between Walls

A Senior Thesis in the Department of
English and Creative Writing

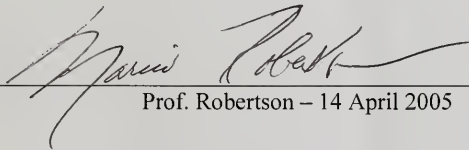
By Charlotte L. Speilman

Defended and Approved 14 April 2005

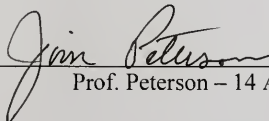


4/14/05

Prof. Merritt- Thesis Project Faculty Advisor – 14 April 2005



Prof. Robertson – 14 April 2005



Prof. Peterson – 14 April 2005

The Beauty Not Found Between Walls

Charlotte Speilman
Senior Honors Thesis
Spring 2005

Table of Contents

Introduction	I-XXII
Bibliography	XXIII-XXIV
Part I	
Rooftop Nights	2
Secondhand Jeans	3
Daydreams	5
Drifting Questions	6
Hallowed Porcelain	7
Reread	8
Awakening	9
Floor Futons	10
Sugarcane Dreams	13
Part II	
Could I be her	15
What You Know	18
What You Hear	19
Red Marbles	20
A Single Gemini	22
Zaire	26
Part III	
Generations	28
My Boy of Blue	29
Child's Laugh	30
Thanksgiving Pie	32

loving hate	35
The Beauty Not Found Between Walls	37
Claim	40
An Everlasting Peace	41
Reading Leaves	43

Part IV

Fusing	45
Watering Hole	46
My soldier	47
Festering	50
Grounding Home	51
Eve mother of God	52
To Watch Eden Burn	54
Sweetness Comes	55

Part V

Hunting the Holy	58
Killing Desdemona	59
Street Talk	60
Transition	61
I've known you from before	62
Mornings	63
Fresh Orange Juice	65

On my birthday following my first year at college I received a book inscribed: “You have traveled many places. You will travel many places. Some of what you are seeking will be found close to home. With love, Dad.” Looking at the inscription I wondered whose home my father was referring: his home, our home, or my home? Upon initial reading I thought that he was referring to his beloved Blue Ridge Mountains: the place he loves more than anywhere else he has been. Still I continued wondering: if the majority of my life was not spent in the Blue Ridge, did this location still work its way into my vocabulary as home?

My earliest memories place me in Nelson County, Virginia. I lived on farms that had been in my mother’s family for years and was often told the great stories of how our family worked that land through better and worse. Around the age of twelve, however, my parents, sisters, and I moved to a small city in California. There I switched from measuring land in acres to measuring it in square feet. No longer was I in a land of family history, but in one of new developments. I spent my critical life-adjusting teen years in California, but, grasping for something different, I chose at 18 to return to Virginia for college.

Starting classes at Sweet Briar I found myself deeply intrigued by recurring themes of home and identity. In a course on modern African

history, I encountered many people for whom home had been called into question due to the presence of European colonial powers. European-educated Africans of the cities soon found themselves caught between worlds: too African to be accepted as European and too European to be accepted as African. Leopold Senghor was such a man, struggling to define home and identity in relation to both Senegal and France. But he was not alone. In readings for my Native American Literature class I discovered books like Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins's autobiography, *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko, and many more, all concentrating on questions of personal location and cultural identity. In classes for Asian Civilizations, Buddhism, Cause and Prevention of Civil War, I encountered questions such as: "what makes me who I am," "does where I'm from tell about who I am," and "can I only be from one culture?" Soon these questions became impossible to escape, not only in the classroom, but in co-curricular life as well.

Like many journeys before my own, my journey into the idea of home started with an internal reflection. Wondering why the notions of home had affected world politics and fueled conflicts for so long, I turned to my own identity for answers. Finding myself unable to define my own home, I started looking towards friends, family, strangers, and books for answers.

Thus, I opened a new chapter in my research. No longer was I just researching myself, but I was also researching the greater human population. I no longer just wanted to create a personal definition of home; I wanted to better understand what home was to others. Looking at home beyond just my own thoughts, I questioned whether others conceived of home as a location, a web of relationships, or a mental/emotional state.

Home as a location can be a tricky concept. After all, not everyone has the option of staying in one location all of their lives (nor do they always want to). Is it possible to live far away from one's home? A large diaspora population provides the economic underpinning of many third world groups. Is money being sent back in support of family or in support of the land itself? What is the home that they are trying to protect? Is their bond to the location or to other people? If location is home, then what is its significance to the individual and the group? And why has land sparked so many populations into fighting wars? I can distinctly remember my father looking out over my family farm and saying, "This land here makes me understand why people are willing to die for their homes." I thought the place was beautiful, but I had no intention of sacrificing life to save it.

With land so closely connected to the idea of home and personal identity, the question arises as to how land acts as a constituent of self?

When asking a person where his or her home is, we are seeking to better understand that person. But how do we identify ourselves in relation to land? What do we really learn from finding out someone is from San Francisco or Idaho? Is there an underlying communal personality we are trying to pick up on? Does living in New York City and consuming coffee from the same corner shop bond two people in an understanding of the world that only New Yorkers can have? Does geographical location really inform us of a person's ideology? Or is there no real difference between New York City and San Francisco? Does, as Italo Calvino suggests in *Invisible Cities*, every city merely "repeat its life, identical, shifting up and down on its empty chessboard [leaving] the inhabitants [to] repeat the same scenes, with the actors changed."¹ Are there no real differences in living in different cities, but rather only differences between living outside or in a city? Do all cities have a repeating personality found anywhere in the world? Are we so concerned with understanding, if not predicting, others' behavior that we have to look to home-as-location as a prediction of a person's underlying personality?

But location is not the only conception of home. After all, where does that leave a nomad? Is a nomad's home the general area that he wanders in?

¹ Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities*. New York: Harcourt, Inc. 1972 p. 64-65

Or what he carries? Or the people he travels with? In *Desert Flower*, Waris Dirie tells the story of her life journey, from living with a nomadic herding family in the Sudan to becoming a super model in London and New York City. It is not until she is happily married and starting a family that she finds her home. For Dirie, home is not a place, but a bond between people. Finding home is not settling in a location, but finding someone to spend life with. Thus, home can also be conceived in terms of interpersonal relationships. Similarly, Susan Brind Morrow in *The Names of Things* says of her friend: “David talks, as always, with the tenderness of a brother, he is unknowingly bringing me home.”² For Morrow home is the feeling of family, the comfort found in a relationship with another person. She often wonders if home is “what holds people together when everything around them is falling apart—”³ home being the connection between people. When asking about a person’s home, are we asking about a place or about relationships with others? And how does a person’s relationships with others help to identify who he or she is?

Still, not every person would respond to the “home question” with either a location or a relationship. In *Hunting from Home* Christopher Camuto argues that home is a state of mind and not an actual place: “Either

² Morrow, Susan Brind. *The Names of Things: Life, Language, and Beginnings in the Egyptian Desert*, New York: Riverhead Books, 1997 p. 108

³ Ibid, 109.

everything matters or nothing matters. Either we are all always at home or all everywhere homeless.”⁴ Is home simply a relaxing center in us all? Is the home that we are so often questioned about really just a state of mind that each of us seeks? Is the question of home not asking us to look outwardly, but in fact inside?⁵

II

They say that ‘home is where the heart is,’
I think it’s where the *house* is.
-Emily Dickinson⁶

Gaston Bachelard would have agreed with Dickinson, taking her statement one step further by stressing the importance of the childhood home. Bachelard declares: “We know perfectly that we feel calmer and more confident when in the old home, in the house we were born in, than we do in the houses on streets where we have only lived as transients.”⁷ For him the home is ultimately that first place that we know, and our struggle as adults is that we can never be as comfortable in other places after that first home.

⁴ Camuto, Christopher. *Hunting from Home*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003 p.315.

⁵ A version of the previous pages also appeared in the thesis proposal for this project.

⁶ Guttman, Allen. “Images of Value and the Sense of the Past,” *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Mar., 1962), 3-26. p. 3.

⁷ Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1958 p. 43.

Despite Bachelard's certainty that we all feel at home in our first home, contemporary Polish poet and essayist Adam Zagajewski does not feel this way. Zagajewski's family was expelled from Lvov, and his "entire childhood was spent under the sign of longing for the lost Lvov, which [he] had left as a four-month-old infant."⁸ According to Bachelard, Zagajewski should have felt at home in this place of his childhood, yet with a family that was always dreaming of somewhere else, Zagajewski found himself also longing for something other than what he had. Instead of feeling at home anywhere, Zagajewski felt divided between the city of longing (Lvov) and the present city (Gliwice).

Bachelard might argue that Zagajewski was not at home in his place of first remembrance, because it was not his place of birth, constitutive of the original subconscious feeling of home. But Zach Braff, in his screenplay *Garden State*, postulates that there is a "point in [our] lives when [we] realize that the house that [we] grew up in isn't really [our] home anymore[.] All of the sudden even though you have some place where you can put your stuff that idea of home is gone."⁹ Whereas Bachelard argues that the house of birth holds home forever, Braff thinks that over time that original house

⁸ Zagajewski, Adam. *Two Cities: On Exile, History, and the Imagination*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press (1991), p.167.

⁹ Braff, Zach. *Garden State*. 2004 [electronic bulletin board] (cited 14 March 2005) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0333766/>

loses the feeling of home, and as in a “rite of passage...[we] won't have this feeling again until [we] create a new idea of home for [ourselves]...for [our] kids, [with] the famil[ies we] start.”¹⁰ Although Bachelard likes to define the space of beginning as a person's real home, it is obvious from writers like Zagajewski and Braff that this definition does not fit everyone.

Home, race, gender, generation, geopolitical location, and sexual orientation all exhibit claims to identity in the modern world.¹¹ Just as race is a constructed category, often invented and reshaped in the individual's mind (with outside influences), so too is home. Home is part of our make-up and is, in this way, often a design of the intimate layers of the self. As a constructed entity, home is not simply defined as one thing or another, as we have seen in our comparisons of Bachelard and Zagajewski. These same debates of home become all the more externalized in postcolonial poets. Caught in conflicts between languages and lands, these poets explore culture in their poetry as a means of seeking their identities and homes.

James Fenton in *A Handbook to English Poetry* argues that poetry is a form of cultural expression based on language. For him, the trends and art of English poetry help to define English-speaking culture and tradition. Yet, if this is the case, postcolonial poets often find themselves more lost in

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Bhabha, Homi k. *The location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994 p.1.

language than found. When one must fight between creating in the mother tongue or creating in the tongue of the ruling power, which does one choose? “Martin Heidegger famously describes language as the home of being, but what if we experience the language we live in as primarily home to another?”¹² A. K. “Ramanujan spoke Tamil at home, along with English, in an area where Kannada was the regional language.”¹³ And in his work, one can see the questions of self and culture, of the individual within the state, of past affecting present, and of home come to life. In the end of his poem “Drafts” he states:

mother’s almond eyes mix with my wife’s
ancestral hazel

to give my son green flecks in a painter’s eye,
but the troubled look is all his own¹⁴

As a physical reminder of the past that has merged to create the present, eye color here is used by Ramanujan to show the hybridism that has created his family and his home. “One way of approaching the question ‘Who am I?’ these poets suggest, is to ask ‘Who are we?’”¹⁵ Postcolonial poetry is a product of globalization or the “process whereby individual lives and local communities are affected by economics and cultural forces that operate

¹² Ramazani, Jahan. *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001 p 13.

¹³ Ibid, 7.

¹⁴ Ibid, 86.

¹⁵ Ibid, 9.

world-wide. In effect it is the process of the world becoming a single place.”¹⁶ As languages begin to merge in the postcolonial world, these poets find themselves caught having to make the choice of what will be the language of home.

Beyond the choice of language that a postcolonial poet has to face is the choice of the “homeland.” When one is a combination of things, of cultures, of ideas, which does that person choose to claim? The dilemma that this problem creates can be seen in Derek Walcott’s “The Schooner Flight:”

I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
and either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation.¹⁷

Here, there is the feeling that these combinations of existence must create something new, something of itself, or it must mean that there is nothing there at all. Walcott is asking: what am I if not all of these things? In order to create his home he has had to focus on a present existence, one that does not lead him back but forward. Walcott writes that return is “impossible, for we cannot return to what we have never been.”¹⁸ A part of the past is not what Walcott can claim; he is not English, nor is he African. These places of origin are not home, not who he is, but rather home is a hybrid of his

¹⁶ Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1998 p.110.

¹⁷ Ramazani, 62.

¹⁸ Ibid, 59.

present, coming together to create a new nation. This “coming together” of the world is what creates the blending of identities that recurs throughout the postcolonial experience, creating in poetry the hybrid muse.

Similar to Zagajewski’s writings and to the hybrid identity of the postcolonial poet, is the exile’s home. “Home for the exile is an imagined country created through layers of memory, nostalgia, and desire: ‘The expression of the desire for home becomes a substitute for home.’”¹⁹ One in exile is caught between the memory of the old place, and where one is now, finding that “home is both here and there.”²⁰ Like the postcolonial poet caught between worlds at the location of birth, the exile is caught between worlds after having to leave the first home. But like the postcolonial poet, the poet in exile also struggles between languages.

Diana Der Hovanessian in her poem “Without You I Am,” in which the “You” refers to the Armenian language, writes that she is “direction without home, home without hearth... words without heart.”²¹ In her choice to write in English, Hovanessian is expressing the “here” of her present existence, but in her subject, the loss of home without the Armenian language, she is expressing the “there” of her former existence. If “home is

¹⁹ Gready, Paul. “The South African Experience of Home and Homecoming.” *World Literature Today: A Literary Quarterly of the University of Oklahoma*, v. 63 (Summer 1994, p. 509-515) , p. 509.

²⁰ Ibid, 509.

²¹ Keenan, Debrah and Lloyd, Roseann, eds. *Looking for Home: Women writing about Exile*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Edits, 1990 p. 47.

the only place in the world where one is not a stranger,”²² the exile finds herself caught, feeling familiar with both the place she currently lives and the memory of the place she left. In this way the exile’s home is both the here and the there, the present and the past.

The hybrid exploration of postcolonial poets reflects much of the approach I found myself taking in writing about home. Although I sought to question group identity within home and group actions like those taken by and against a government, I still was not of a postcolonial background myself. A combination of east and west coasts notwithstanding, I was still locked into one cultural state, and postcolonial theory was not enough to bring my work on home together under a single rubric. Nor did I feel completely exiled from any location, so that this type of poetry did not entirely capture my experiences or provide the definition of home I was seeking.

I first approached the question of home as a scientist, hoping to dissect my way down to a root of understanding. I tried to separate home into cells that could each be dismembered and individually scrutinized. Home’s essence was distilled into the categories of location, family/relationships, and state-of-being. After this initial formulation, I

²² Gready, p. 511.

came to realize that each cell should be further subdivided according to the different reactions to home that they provoked. I was on a mission to find the most meaningful definition of home. Yet as I dissected home, I felt I was further fracturing myself. The works of novelists, playwrights, and philosophers still did not seem to be able to clearly define home in a universal manner. Although I found similarities in the poetry of exiles and postcolonial writers, there still didn't seem to be a genre fit between their work and my own. Wandering among all the contradicting and complementary definitions, I came to realize that home is "anything one wants it to be...as much a function of fate as of choice."²³ Because of the individuality that the definition of home, like other forms of identity, takes on, it seemed more logical to place my own poetry (as a question of home) in the context of another poet who also questions home instead of in the context of an entire genre of poetry.

Redolent to the exile, caught between being in one place and wanting to be in another, is Elizabeth Bishop's poem "Questions of Travel." The exile may long for home or another place, but Bishop wonders:

Think of the long trip home.
Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?

²³ Gready, 510.

Where should we be today?²⁴

In “Questions of Travel” Bishop does not hope for another place but wonders as to which place she should be in. Should she stay at home? Should she travel? As Bishop questions where to be that day, she is questioning the need for a signally located home. If home is one place, should we always (if given the choice) stay there? Is leaving it abandoning the only thing we have? In the end of “Questions of Travel” Bishop wonders: “Should we have stayed home, wherever that may be?”²⁵ In this way Bishop does not dream of home like the exile, but wonders if one must want or need to stay at home once home is found. Is traveling defying home?

Elizabeth Bishop was born in Worcester Massachusetts, February 8, 1911. By the time Bishop was the age of four, her mother had been committed to a mental asylum. She spent the rest of her childhood between grandparents in Worcester and in Great Village, Nova Scotia.²⁶ After graduating from Vassar, “Bishop did what feisty young women did in those days—she moved to Greenwich Village [and] traveled to Europe.”²⁷ After traveling through Europe, she moved to Key West, before taking a trip to

²⁴ Bishop, Elizabeth. *The Complete Poems: 1927-1979*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983 p.93.

²⁵ Bishop, 94.

²⁶ McClatchy, J. D., ed. *The Voice of a Poet: Elizabeth Bishop*. New York: Random House AudioBooks

²⁷ Ibid, 7.

Brazil that would end up lasting twenty years. Finally, in 1970 Bishop moved to Boston to teach at Harvard; it would be her last move; on October 6, 1979 Bishop died and asked that her grave read “Awful, but cheerful.”²⁸

Moving around for much of her life, from early childhood, Bishop lived a life questioning location. When asked whether she would rather write or travel, Bishop exclaimed “Oh to travel. It’s much easier!”²⁹ Travel may be a passion found in many of us, but Bishop not only toured parts of the world, but also lived in diverse and wildly contrasting places such as Florida and New England, Nova Scotia and Brazil. Such a lifestyle is bound to be riddled with questions of locating home, as we have seen in “Questions of Travel.” She explores these themes extensively in her last two books, *Questions of Travel* and *Geography III*, analyzing home through exile, transitions, and the idea of “here.” It is through these three states that Bishop situates home in the now that is all of our homes.

Beyond not having a home, is the idea of being turned away from one’s home. Perhaps you are a refugee who has had to flee a war-torn nation, or maybe you are a young-adult who just got kicked out of you parents’ house. All types of exiles have the hopelessness of not being able

²⁸ Ibid, 9.

²⁹ Monteiro, George ed. *Conversations with Elizabeth Bishop*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996 p.101.

to return, of only being able to move forward. In “The Burglar of Babylon,” Bishop speaks of an exiled people:

On the fair green hills of Rio
There grows a fearful stain:
The poor who came to Rio
And can’t go home again.³⁰

In order to be banished from a location one must have a starting point, a “home” to which one cannot return. Although the specific location of that place is not given here, it is clear that these people have left a place never to return. Bishop does not explore whether this lost home was a chosen location of life or a location afforded by birthright, but she does look at the fight for life in the diaspora, as people are “building [heir] nests, or houses, / Out of nothing, or air.”³¹ The desperation to recreate a place of safety is a way of clinging to life. Despite exile, one has to hang on to something, something not home, but something that will keep you surviving. We see how strong the desire to remake comfort is in the line, “But they cling and spread like lichen.”³² In these ways, Bishop uses her “The Burglar of Babylon” in order to express the drive that exile generates within a person to create comfort or home, regardless of how impossible the task may be.

³⁰ Bishop, 112.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

This seeking to create in order to fill a need, seen in “The Burglar of Babylon” in the context of exile, is also present in Bishop’s “Sandpiper.” In this poem a sandpiper lives its life on the margin of beach and ocean. For this bird

The world is a mist. And then the world is
minute and vast and clear...³³

The existence of the sandpiper is one of mist and clarity colliding together, meaning that although, on one level, existence may seem clear, on another, all of existence is baffling. And in this world of parallel fog and sun, the sandpiper is “looking for something, something, something.”³⁴ Because of the duality of this life, the sandpiper is looking for the middle, the place of calm. He is looking too for food, for safety, for that something to help him survive. Bishop goes on to explain his state:

Poor Bird, he is obsessed!
The millions of grains are black, white, tan, and gray,
Mixed with quartz grains, rose and amethyst.³⁵

Just as the exiled, sifting through the rubble of “not home,” seek to find home, so do sandpipers and the rest of us hunt in this foggy-clear world for the element that will allow for survival, for safety, for home.

³³ Ibid, 131.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Beyond the look into exile, Bishop also explores dimensions of home through the idea of transition. “The Filling Station” juxtaposes the person in transit against the person permanently at home in a place of others’ transitions. As the title of the poem reveals, the setting for this piece is a gas station, a point of refueling for many, but not a point of existence. A filling station is a place of pause, transition on the way to the next location. In this poem, however, Bishop points out that in our points of transition someone else is living. “(It’s a family filling station)...Do they live in the station?”³⁶ Here the narrator of the poem comes to realize that here in her spot of movement (a place that she can see no other purpose for besides a quick stop) is, in fact, someone’s permanent and chosen residence. Bishop examines transition by pointing out that we all move through places of permanent residence. Through this view, we can see that the world is a large collision of differently timed movements and standings still. Just as the narrator of the poem does not expect to see a filling station as a home, we see that there is no place labeled “stay,” no place labeled “leave,” and thus, there cannot be a single place labeled “home.”

As seen above, Bishop explores home through ideas of exile, seeking, and transition. But what is home in Bishop’s writings? Home is simply

³⁶ Ibid, 127.

“here.” Occurring countless times in her poetry, “here” is a place of ownership and non-ownership; it is a place of the now. Bishop starts *Questions of Travel* with the poem “Arrival at Santos.” The first lines of that poem are:

Here is a coast; here is a harbor;
here, after a meager diet of horizon, is some scenery...³⁷

This use of “here” is defined by the descriptions of locations found in the present, but does not render ownership of these locations to anyone. They exist in the “here” and are thus the focus of this moment in the narrator’s life; however, ‘here’ also lacks direct ownership and therefore does not provide assurance that the objects (or things being described) will remain in the narrator’s life. Later in “Questions of Travel” the statement “there are too many waterfalls here”³⁸ reveals distaste for something in the now. The excess of waterfalls is not to the pleasure of the narrator, and yet the waterfalls still exist and are the ‘here’ of that narrator’s existence. Once again, there is little sense of ownership of “here;” the narrator may dislike the waterfalls, trying to push herself away from them, but all she accomplishes is alienating herself in this moment’s location. But Bishop also uses “here” in a more intimate way when in “In the Waiting Room,” she

³⁷ Ibid, 89.

³⁸ Ibid, 93

asks “How had I come to be here?”³⁹ This is not only an awareness of the “now,” but also a moment of self-awareness. She is connecting the self to the “here,” an intimate relation that has not always made, in this moment she is owning here. By placing ‘here’ and “I” together, the self exerts a level of claim or ownership over the ‘here.’ In Bishop’s work ‘here’ takes on the ownership and non-ownership of the present; for Bishop this is the most important and defining thread of being. Other things in life can get lost as we see in “One Art:”

The art of losing isn’t hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster...⁴⁰

But the one thing that Bishop relies upon always being there is the ‘here’ of the now. Thus, for Bishop, as a questioner of standing-still, home becomes the one thing that is constant in life, the intimate “here” that the self finds itself dwelling in.

Elizabeth Bishop may not have produced masses of work, but what she did produce, she crafted with perfection. Critics sometimes point out that Bishop writes of objects and not of people, but to assume that this shows a lack of intimacy in her work would be false. A traveler by design, she works in her poetry to place herself in the world around her. This

³⁹ Ibid, 161.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 178.

lifestyle of movement was translated into her poem as the questioning of home through the ideas of exiles, times of transition, times of seeking, and the concept of 'here.' *Questions of Travel* and *Geography III* address these issues and pull the idea of home together into the 'here' of Bishop's work. Ultimately, the recurring theme of self-realization in the 'here' becomes the reliable location for home, always in the now.

Similar to Bishop, I too have used my poetry to question location and home. As a traveler, it is natural to question home, where you are going and where you have been. A traveler soon starts to notice that the only thing she has is the present place she is in. Home, for the traveler, thus easily transcends a given location, becoming instead people, a feeling, things of comfort, a sense of belonging, or simply the ability to claim these things as one's own. Just as every post-colonial poet has something new to bring to the dialogue concerning life after the colonialism, Bishop also brings her individual exploration of home-identity to the field. Because the idea of home is so intimate, connected to a singular person, no exploration of home by two different people could yield the same results. Home is a feeling of comfort, of safety, of belonging; therefore it is the individual's choice to claim one thing over another that constitutes home. Whatever we may find as our place of belonging, whether it is a house, a culture, or another person,

it is that claim that generates our sense of home. This means that no matter the poet, no matter the time, the borders of home are open, welcoming exploration, since no journey to discover and stake a claim to home can be the same.

My own poetry in this project is consequently a journey into the foggy-clear terrain of analyzing home. Here I examine not only the different choices of home that people make, but also the effects these choices have on everyone. Like postcolonial poets and Elizabeth Bishop, in my work, I too question my personal identity in connection to the concept of home. *The Beauty Not Found Between Walls* is an exploration of my claims to self and home. But my interests go beyond the merely personal examining what effects our concepts of home have on the world. Parts of my poetry also explore how claims to home can create harmony among people or promote chaos. In researching and then writing about home, I feel as if I have discovered a secret that everyone already knows: there is nothing new and there is always something new to add to the idea of home. This project is not meant to tell anyone what home is; it is not meant to teach or show the exact effects home can have. Instead *The Beauty Not Found Between Walls* is meant to represent home, to allow the reader to question and discover home on his or her own, to discover the unveiled secret.

Bibliography

- Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth, and Tiffin, Helen. Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Bachelard, Gaston. The Poetic of Space. Boston: Beacon Press, 1958.
- Bhabha, Homi K. The Location of Culture. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Bishop, Elizabeth. The Complete Poems: 1927-1979. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983.
- Boeri, Stefano and Harvard, Rem Koolhaas, and Kwinter, Stanford. Mutations. Barcelona: ACTAR. .
- Braff, Zach dir. Garden State. By Zach Braff. Fox Spotlight Pictures and Miramax Films, 2004.
- Calvino, Italo. Invisible Cities. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 1972.
- Camuto, Christopher. Hunting from Home. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003.
- Dirie, Waris and Miller, Cathleen. Desert Flower: The Extraordinary Journal of a Desert Nomad. New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc, 1999.
- Didion, Joan. Where I was From. New York: Random House Adult Trade Publishing Company, 2003.
- Fenton, James. An introduction to English poetry. London: Penguin Group, 2002.
- Gready, Paul. "the South African Experience of Home and Homecoming." *World Literature Today: A Literary Quarterly of the University of Oklahoma*, v. 63 (Summer 1994), p. 509-515.
- Keenan, Deborah and Lloyd Roseann, eds. Looking for Home: Women Writing about Exile. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1990.
- Kureishi, Hanif. Intimacy: A Novel. London: Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, 1999.
- McCabe, Susan. Elizabeth Bishop: Her Poetics of Loss. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.

- McClatchy, J.D. ed. The Voice of the Poet: Elizabeth Bishop. New York: Random House AudioBooks.
- Michaels, Anne. Fugitive Pieces. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.
- Milosz, Czeslaw. Road-side Dog. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998.
- Monteiro, George, ed. Conversations with Elizabeth Bishop. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1996.
- Morrow, Susan Brind. The Names of Things. New York: Riverhead Books, 1997.
- Oliver, Mary. A Poetry Handbook. Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994.
- Percy, Walker. Lost in the Cosmos: The last self-help book. New York: Picador, 1983.
- Ramazani, Johan. The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press: 2001.
- Smith, Zadie. White Teeth. New York: Vintage International, 2000.
- Zagajewski, Adam. Two Cities: on Exile, History, and the Imagination. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2002.

Part I

Rooftop Nights

I'm sure there is a secret code
for the club that meets
at half past ten
Flutes are played
till everyone gets in
I'm not as sure who is there
and what is really said or done
but I'm pretty sure that they are
having much more fun
than me
sitting on this wooden balcony

their life is
movement
a flow of finding
new space
in the same place
changing the beat
to meet their own time

from my perch I watch
wonder
from the rooftop
what would happen
if I left my permanent
spot

when the sunlight cracks
open the morning sky
they scurry home
to rest
I am still here, no where to return to

She is gracing one of us with light
Wasting it on too little life

Secondhand Jeans

The application asks if I'm a refugee
no one has held a gun to my head, told me to leave
no one has asked me to stay

in speeches sometimes I
have been told my families
are not families
it seems I don't hold up morality
what have I lived on thus far

I'm not a French Huguenot fleeing to England
this is not 1685
my religious troubles are on the inside
and my political ones manifest
as two men screaming for neither side
melting into a middle both despise

in my parents' house
on holidays
sometimes I'm alone
caring about everything
that makes no difference
in their lives

looks of puzzlement
easily turn into looks
of distaste
a simple look of anger
recalls tantrums of years past
as if I will never outgrow
mistakes of a ten year old

no one has asked me to leave
so what could I be running from

will I change locations like tee-shirts flung
aside three or four times a day
varying with mood

or is home like staying in secondhand jeans
comfortable, faded, threadbare

Daydreams

In between yesterday and today
still lies day
lost in worry
over whether to say yes to
yest or to, prefixes
obsessed with time
fighting for attention
tangling us in dry webs
crumbling in moments
we're not sure exist
remembering realities of past
fantasies growing old
trying to shape and force
a truth for the future
banking on prospect
grasping at what is
invisible to sight and touch
reaching in hope of keeping sanity from
driving us further in

Drifting Questions

How many *Sex and the City* episodes does it take
to make me want a relationship
with only one place
so close that
when asked what restaurants are good
I'll be stuck naming the same three

is every spot fresh for exploration
or can I find the same chai
in every coffeehouse

cranberry salad and ginger ice tea
are frozen for me at the Blue Coyote Café
will they thaw if I return

trees and streets of Virginia
drift in and out of childhood
will she ever let me grow old

I fear stagnant life
jellied-fish dessert
the way it sits in the back of your throat
triggering your vomit reflex
while you pray for the bitter green tea
to wash it away

maybe I associate moving with living
still I cry every time I pack

could the safety of deeply known places
make you forget exploration

is the most intimate connection
a rejection of change

Hallowed Porcelain

Toilet seat covers are never there
in their white holders on the white
stall walls next to the white rimmed seats
heaven forbid color be associated
with this shrine of cleanliness
would red or black really lead us astray
from our duties to only expose our backsides
to corners worthy of their revealing
we spend our time cleaning, scrubbing
sanitizing the unsanitary
hoping to forget
how messy life is

Reread

When something leaves
how long do we hold out for its return
when you take off for vacation
do I hold your place
or read ahead

when you're absent for years
do I reread your words or
await the sequel

how many times
can a snow-peaked adventure
be repeated
how many times
can a romance
re-grow

if I forget our story
will I know to hold its place
on the shelf

are our books meant to be
lived
or read

Awakening

I started the day
two hours too late
finding work
like my life
undone—

Scanning the house
moving room to room
half full mugs
sit, bellied with cold
black tea.
You're gone
again.

This is how it feels
to finish something
not done
a novel ending
in blank pages.

Floor Futons

We don't know
and that scares us
shitless
we create
languages to explain
it all away
science
government
philosophy

are we so far from the truth
truth that is
an arm around your waist at night
sitting outside in the rain
or listening to the same song over and over
wishing you could remember
what you forgot at birth
hoping to work far enough back
to find
before life—
assuming it's the same after
 somehow unchanged, we go back

Scraping nails through sand
trying to hold tight to
beliefs that keep me alive
and it doesn't bother me
 that they aren't the same
as yours
mine are not right
yet I keep holding them
just to stay alive
As you try just as hard
to understand through codes of
metaphor, security dilemmas, mitosis

Is it true, Tracy
Love is hate, war is peace
hoping not
I ask Kant to hold my hand
believing in principles
of hidden lines that
 direct us to right
 and keep us safe
if I love enough
will I be loved in return

waking up I realize that I'm far from the ground
close to the edge of my bed
moments away from a certain fall
there are no pillows to cushion
no one to pull me back
I wonder how long I was that close
to definite pain

I couldn't fix it all but
I stopped the fall
now I'm sleeping on the floor



Sugarcane Dreams

I've taken to spending
these hot summer days
sucking on sugarcane
until it's wet splintery wood
held between my chapped lips
I let my tongue hunt
for more treats in
the stringy chips
as my eyes search
the passing landscape
for any familiar
tree

These momentary pleasures become
life goals
hardening my focus
into sweet dreams

Sitting on busses
I flail
arms out windows
throwing cedis at the orange-clad women
grabbing for treats
from their head baskets

I'm spending too much time
at the post office
smiling at foreign addresses
envisioning going
home

Yet three thousand feet up
I realize that
the orange-clad girls
have all the sugarcane

*Cedi- currency of Ghana

Part II

Could I be her

I

I want to be a ruined city
leaving my contents
to the imaginations of others
knot works
tangled over melting stone

in your eyes
my towers reach the sun
columns were built
to hold up the sky
as if no temple could
be greater than heaven
courtyards were flooded
with their mistresses'
favorite colors and their paths
burned in petals of reds, yellows, or blues
hummingbirds were captured
only allowed to dance
outside the palace
that gathered its beauty
from the gray mountain
it was carved from

yet these walls
like your vision
will crumble over time
And I'll wait for someone
else to dream
and proclaim the glory
that must have been me
wishing to have been
part of the grandeur
of my city
greater in your mind
than I ever was

II

I dream of lakes
I've never seen
stories from authors
I'll never meet
with every foreign page turned
I fall further into
love, black print
a world I can only discover
alone
 are these pyramids I dream
 any less real
 than affairs that last over years
 and leave lovers knowing
 less of each other
the Great Wall painted
someone's imagination
before it became our vacation destination
 the traveler's quest
 stories whispered over fires
 that fall onto pages
 are found forming
 minds

III

the sky could never be tattooed
always demanding change
never remembering
a place from yesterday
there is no memory
no history
to affect
today
no worries of damaging
tomorrow

could I be her
basing cravings
on now
instead of back then

I admire that
she can't be reminded
of any remember
she only is

What You Know

With ease you stride down London streets
simple gestures to catch cabs
slide into tubes
elbows relaxed you maneuver through crowds
as if you were water
trickling down someone else's fall

I follow
two steps behind
mimicking your effortlessness
I'm here
reading silently on trains
bustling over bridges
grabbing for the right queen to hand out in change

But I'm afraid
of the faces I pass
they must know
I'm not real
a fake
a copy of your signature
actions

You walk like nothing can surprise you
time has given you comfort
a stranger
I stumble over road signs
worried that wandering eyes can tell the difference
between you and I

What You Hear

Over green brown beige
carpeted food
titled: Ethiopian
foreign tastes sit on my tongue
I look up
question what I've been doing wrong
is it because
I don't say trousers
"No offence Charlotte
but Mark
don't come back with an awful American
accent"

You roll r's over coastal hills
smoothing words
like rounded marbled stairs
while I mumble apologies
through pushing crowds
hoping my voice is not
salting wounded ears

The bus driver was angry
the shop tender was short
the street beggar annoyed
Was it something I said?
Was it something I sound?

Red Marbles

I

I woke an empty mason jar
and with every year
I rummaged through
scattered colored marbles
selecting
blue-pink swirled ones
placing them in the bottom
of my jar
watching as
they slowly mixed
thawing into dark red
layers of labor
piled without notice
this half empty jar
I made her

II

Evening, before sleep
my eyes wander
hunt become bobcat eyes
darkness, desperation
I must find place
the place for my jar

I balance her
on tree limbs
in moss
mud puddles
grass fields
these are not her
place

Dawn, after sleep
I look out
glass walls filtering in light
I'm inside
the jar
is my place

A Single Gemini

1

Saturdays were for shopping
discount stores, Old Navy
but first
we had to attend
Chinese school
meetings in small classrooms
girls would scribble lines
transforming ink into art
art into letters

2

Roman characters
lack Character
to me

3

Out to dinner
over bread and wine
I wait patiently
amongst the French
for a comment in English
to rejoin the conversation

4

Game night at Nancy's
we all play Mahjong
clicking tiles together
counting marks for numbers
her mother gives us lychee
her father gives us tips
30 years experience
behind his tile arrangements

5

It's not Christmas
winter here gets to be blue and white
receiving presents
a holiday for light
I wish I had this every year

6

Studying for Calculus
I wait
the Punjabi fades,
back on integrals

7

Before school I'm waiting
for her to finish
morning seminary
it's herbal tea time
she'll enter temples in her life
I'll never get to see

8

Graduation, a Pilipino feast
lost between vegetables and
pig's tail
friends laugh playfully
at the three 'non-brown' girls

9

Application boxes on blue paper read
Asian
Pacific Islander
Native American
African-American
White
Other
I don't even get the grace of 'other'
I check white
colorless, flavorless, nothing

10

They all have secret identities
covert agents of culture
living in two different worlds
having something to be theirs
and something that is ours
but I only get one
I have no clubs
my food is found in any store
my words everyone knows
my fables everyone has heard
I am blank, without secrets



Zaire

Maybe I was supposed to be
from Zaire
sending packages back to the US
with letters starting
“Here in Zaire...”

I might have seen giraffes
or lived in a hectic city
of skyscrapers and mismatched shacks
I might have loved to shop
at a market near my house
that was mazed with dirt paths
beaten by the traffic of human feet
there my Zairian best friend sells cloth
by the yard and I scramble
to get the newest pattern
with my breakfast fruit
or maybe I would grow
most of my food in my own backyard
laboring for hours over unripened yams

Perhaps I'd have a pet monkey
caught too young from the bush
by a boy too young to be working
or maybe a small kitten would
stumble through my open window
and I would name her Panther
either way I'm sure I would
find some kind of love
within the sweaty borders of Zaire

But instead Zaire is gone, replaced
by the Democratic Republic of the Congo
someone has gotten in my way
kept me from my Zaire mailing address
now how will I ever know
if Zaire was my home

Part III

Generations

Holding back traditions
that spill out of sand
filled tide pools

we wonder
if our daughters
should know of the life before
if there is knowledge
in living part of the past

we cried for warm clothes
they cry for new nail polish
lighting candles at night is silly
dull compared to TV
old books to live by
grow dusty on coffee tables
we gossip in comfortable tongues
they hear with foreign ears
our secrets kept
they learn French instead

the furniture is too ugly for friends
we didn't know of other colored chairs
what is wrong with white

this is progress
where nothing looks the same

My Boy of Blue

I wish for you to know my oldest son.
Know him the way I do. To have him hold
onto your leg in a crowd. But maybe
for you it will be your hand that he holds.
I want you to be able to run your nails
through his hair, messing it all up, telling
him to speak up.

I know that he is quiet.
Too quiet perhaps. But he speaks to me, he
speaks inside of me. His voice can carry
in my heart for longer than any span
of time that I know. I want his presence
to make the same mark on you. Branding your
body with his thoughts.

This is my hope:
Not that he has other mothers, but friends.
I see that you are shy, like my son. Reach
out to him. Children can't you see each other?
This small brown-eyed girl and my little blue
eyed son both sit here surrounded by noise
they are not adding to. Their minds must be
racing with thoughts I cannot understand.

I know they can speak to one another
what cannot be spoken to the others.
But what creates their common ground creates
their walls to hide behind
they are silent.

Child's Laugh

Inspired by Yusef Komunyakaa's poetry

I'm hiding
in the grass
fields, brown and dead
from summer heat.
The stalks tower above me.
Here, I think I am Queen,
have control of everything.
Back home
mummy gets to tell me
what to do. I don't like
that. It makes me feel
lost like when my
sister, sick on the bus,
threw up on my
favorite matching purple bear
sweat-suit. I was scared
the kids would laugh
at me, like they did
at my purple spelling book.
Mummy says I'm not stupid,
but she doesn't have
to leave class with
the other kids. Second grade
watches us trail out
of the room, like ants.
I know a lot about
watching ants. I can
never decide if I want
to be a red ant or a black
one. I wonder if there
are behind, disabled
ants. Those kids don't want to be
our kind of ant. Some feel
sorry for us. I don't want that
pity. Alone, I want power.
If nowhere else, let
me have power over my dreams.

So I can guard over
everything, making
the nightmares of monsters
and dying under sheetrock
go away. At least in my sleep
let me be
safe from laughter.

Thanksgiving Pie

Held in the arms of
my oversized
sweater, I sat gazing
open-mouthed and
cold, at the kitchen
now filled with
my family. Smells
wrapped around my legs
and traveled up to
my nose as I snuggled
deeper into the
nest I was creating
in the sleeper bed that
sat facing the
breakfast room. I
pretended that I was
a squirrel making my
winter haven, holding
my breath and hoping
that the sound of
voices laughing in
unison would never
stop.

I admired my
Aunt Jane's sunset
red hair—it did not
matter that
like her wine and everything
she cooked, it also came
from a box.

I smiled at
my Uncle Steve who
sat off to the side
out of cooking's way
with a glass of ice tea
that seemed to always
magically refill.
Talk would bounce

between him and my Dad
only briefly interrupted
here and there
by my grandmother
who was shocked
by something
she would soon discover
she misunderstood.

I would hear
my younger sister
playing the piano
in the dining room
with my grandfather
waiting on the couch
to tell her how wonderful
her beginning notes were.
In the Kitchen
we could all hear
the banging keys
but on this one day
my grandmother
would not correct
her hand position or tell
her to do a different song.

I would marvel at
my older sister who was fluttering
around with my mother
grandmother and aunt
glancing at the stove. They
acted as if a simple stare
at the casserole could whip it
back into shape. And who knows
maybe it could.

As I
cringed at the sight of
mincemeat pie and
watermelon pickle my
stomach grumbled
at the smell of stuffing
and turkey. And I wondered

where my spot was
whether I should join
the side conversation or
help prepare the meal.

And there, at that moment,
I was jealous
that both my sisters
had already found their
places in subtle traditions.

loving hate

grandfather did not like
anything that was
not white like the purity
he saw in the cross

mother could not stand
to see anything
judged, convinced there
was beauty
even in receiving last place

I always asked
how mother could
love her father,
how I could
love her father
how we could
love her father
the only grandfather
that ever said
I love you

Did it bother him that
just enough
or maybe not enough
sun and people will
speak Spanish or Portuguese
to me on the streets or in restaurants

a man that would
never meet my friends
who I might one day have
to hide my children from

did he want me
to crucify my best friend
did he want me
to hang my favorite teacher

did it hurt him
when my other grandfather
jokingly called me
little Indian

—no because he was right and I
was part of his right
coming from a man
who wrote with his left
there I was lost
loving hate

The Beauty Not Found Between Walls

I felt alone
wanting something
I couldn't name
so I screamed
threw paperclips
hair pins
my glasses
at the wall
at the air
at everything
that felt in my way
I was eleven
but already the weight
of not knowing
was seeping
into my skin
I didn't know where
to feel safe
I feared nothing visible
the walls of my room
nor the openness
of the yard, nor
the towers of the woods
could protect me
from what I was sure
hid in the air

I was angry
and it made me hate
everything
anything that I saw
in that bewildered state
I wanted to reach out
and own something
but I wasn't sure
I could ever own enough
maybe if it could be mine
I could know for sure

I belonged
confined in its walls

my parents sat
in the kitchen
not knowing what to do
with the demon
possessing their child
sometimes I yelled at them
but mostly I yelled
against them
and God
and the darkness of my room
and the brightness of outside
I wanted to be beautiful
like the women from old movies
who wore in their distress
dresses silky in cream, emerald, or gold
and played the piano
or harp
expressing every ounce of
confusion
frustration
pain
in complex melodies
as if the motion of swaying
back and forth on boldly struck
notes could cure any
ailment of the soul.

I sat at the top of my bedroom staircase
sobbing, tears drying and crusting
to my face.
My room tunneled in and out
as my vision was obscured
by the tears and waves
of uncontrolled
unnamed emotion.
I wanted to make my misery
wonderful

so I blew, spluttered, and spit
into the double reed of my oboe
but nothing music-like
nothing arabesque nothing mystical
came out of my anger
I could not make something beautiful of hate

Claim

When they moved again,
they hadn't bothered to ask their
son about the house.

Had they, he would have said
how the pink wallpaper
in the living room
made his muscles clench tighter
to his bones,
how the redbrick patio scraped
his feet, and
how the sea-blue bathroom made
him feel alone.

Had they asked and had he said,
they would have replied "It's
not your house."

They would have been right.

In a trailer surrounded by unkept
yards, he found, at 18
something that was his.

When she saw his flea-infested shack,
his mother cried,
not for the misery of her son,
but for her own failure.

Still he found safety
in his own.

An Everlasting Peace

I drifted to sleep still reading poetry
Lights on, book laid across my chest
a loud phone rings, demands my attention
curse the time that has been lost
I keep thinking that I've missed out
somehow
some train somewhere has left me

when I played
I would tell my mom to sit down
handing her an oversized panda bear to be her boyfriend
she would never tell me it was too late
that she was married
letting me believe for a moment
that the world worked on my terms

maybe I'm still fighting
for that to be true
mixing my head with the world's
negotiating the peace treaty of the century

or perhaps my mother was just happy
that I wasn't throwing the bear
at my sister
biting her for being
in my way

maybe mom knew
we were fighting each other
because we were still fighting
inside ourselves



Reading Leaves

if calm could come in a cup
labeled white, black, or green
infusing warmth
slipping down the center
of my chest

if refills were endless
and everyone received a morning mug
to steam away
oatmeal gone wrong and papers of people
dying too young
would turbulence disappear
in this early fog

Part IV

Fusing

the snake is the most swallowable
of animals
its solid tube slides down your empty
esophagus
black on black
fusing into one
multilayered cylinder
morphing into a two-headed creature
human and snake craniums
straining
on the same stem
magnets polarized
one face blaming the other
failing to realize
we are all connected
on the other end

Watering Hole

I

Dogs

gentle creatures curled at the end of beds
protecting the sleeping
licking the hand
as it fills the dinner dish
obeying the stern voice
of aged knowledge
they are not allowed to eat people

this is the calm childhood
assumed over the world
somehow every house
must be made from the same
pinewood

yet sunrises sometimes bring
dogs eating humans
and children wheeling AK '47s
there is no sign saying
welcome to Bunia

II

The children are not allowed to watch cartoons
too violent their mother says
we are watching Animal Planet instead
cringing as lions rip each other apart
over water rights
Marcy grabs my hand
six years old
“I’m glad we don’t do that”

My soldier

I met a soldier today
outside the Kew Gardens
both lost
and as we wandered in
fumbling student discount tickets
I asked “what are you doing
in London”
“improving my English for school”
a paramedic from the Israeli army
he wanted to save lives
become a doctor

Posing for pictures next to greenhouses
the graying sky set a rather
grim mood
and I wasn’t going to ask
about the conflict
I wasn’t going to ask how
the army paramedics saved lives
“I’ve seen things I don’t
want to remember”
was all he said

Then at a brink house
surrounded by sleeping
roses hiding from the winter’s cold
he asked what I studied
I said the world
and next to London’s snake-like river
he wanted to know
what I thought of the war

But who was I to say
it was not my home

“we’re trained on humanity”

he told me
“three times we must call out
that we are firing...three times
in Hebrew and Arabic”

Yet on the 31st
she, 11 years old, Palestinian
died, gunshot wounds to the face
 Hamas dropped bombs and
three days later
the attorney general decided
not to take Palestinian East Jerusalem land
two unrelated events

could there be humanity?

“We all want it to end Charlotte”
my soldier tells me while musing
over piranha fish
tropical trees stretch toward glass skies
“I have Palestinian friends, all sides
live in Jerusalem. But you can’t
ask us to give up our land
it’s all we have in the world
Let them go to Jordan, Egypt, anywhere
in the Middle East they all know Arabic
but we have nowhere else to go
this is the only land for Hebrew.”

The coffee and gift shop buzzed
with people avoiding the spitting rain
signs advertised sales
on flower seeds, the chance to make something
pretty out of something so small

there was no kosher food
so we sipped on coffee instead
“we have so little an inch of our desert
is worth 30 miles of your land”
I looked at his now messy hair

the wind had done him no favors
on our walk
“is it because it’s a Jewish state
can you only feel safe in a Jewish state
is this why you love Jerusalem?”
“No Charlotte I was born there, raised there,
I will return to there, it’s because it’s
home”
“Don’t you think others feel this way too,
that this is why Palestinians want to stay”
All I got was a simple nod...and
“We all want it to end”

Festering

People bear cuts of history in arms
dried crusted wounds that stay open
oozing, lasting
beyond death
holding to life
becoming infections passed to the young
wind whispered
over bitter lips, words coupled
mating to the dark beat of hatred
planting violent seeds into
childhood chests, producing adults too young to
know of healing
 too old to seek real peace

Grounding Home

He was six feet under but twelve feet tall
debris rained earth to air to earth again
fragmented dust-clouds choked flared nostrils
eyes squeezed shut, bodies began to cringe
as walkways morphed into scattered red bones
still he does not wake from martyred ground
soul soaking into land he cannot own
lips sealed with rubble, his thorny crown
leaking news reports and letters home
to places never seen but loved ones missed
death filters through walls like cheap cologne
his friends all wonder if he's found bliss
his leaders never question the disarray
of land, family, body, home
peace talks delayed

Eve mother of God

Here

trees could reach the sky
in endless praise of their creator,
never seeming to thirst. Rain fell
as a decoration, like the perfect
amount of ornaments,
on a Christmas tree. And that
is where Eve lived, on moss
softer than any bed conceived
by man.

But that was all she
lived. Seeing the birds fly as
if at first unbound, then watching
them shrink back reaching
the limits of this small garden. Eve lay
in observation of captured
perfection.

Adam was angry, was he
not special? Had God not made
him in his own image? He knew
he could conquer mouse, lion, and bear.
But what was this
small thing laying on his
moss...the moss God had
given him? He had asked
for another being like
him, but what was this?

This was new, different.
He had to know
if he still was the wisest, if he was still
the strongest. That
night he had gone to Eve and
like a hail storm pouring down
white unexpected punches
he had proven
he was better. There he
left the concaving purple body
on the red

moss.

Eve stared at
the night sky, with every short
breath, she was
the first in creation to know suffering.
She knew with every sharp
movement of her leg that she
was the first to feel pain. And there,
she was first to sense
happiness...

She no longer looked
without purpose, now under
a dark sky she understood
beauty. And with each
healing breath she vowed to
give every moving monotonous
bird direction and every wondering
spider a little bit of food.

Adam stood proud on the far
edge of Eden, he had conquered all;
he was god's creation. Eve stood
in the middle and chose to have
the whole world, to even the
playing ground.

A savory spray of juice
erupted from her mouth,
the drops fell to the ground
like a lava flow they claimed
all they encountered on their path.
Earth and Eden finally whole...

And God smiled
knowing that all of him
had been accepted. Then,
he thought "Poor Adam, he
has so much more to conquer
to stay on that mountain top."

the earth knew fear
the earth turned to find God

To Watch Eden Burn

Fear must have started with that flaming sword
which turned everyway
keeping us from
the tree of life
driving us east
toward a fiery sun

now
my skin quivers
eyes cower
as small flames flicker
and black ashes linger
a reminder
of what we begun

The living soon find
themselves
worshiping this god
creator and destroyer
feeding on death
to give life

ashes to ashes and dust to dust
I know what I am to become



Sweetness Comes

Candy falls from the sky
carameling lips

It's Typhoon Season

Overlooking skyscrapers
gardens praise gods

It's Typhoon Season

Toying with T.V.s
cats stay inside

It's Typhoon Season

Against salty winds
umbrellas become condoms

It's Typhoon Season

Purple crawls
across dinner plates

It's Typhoon Season

Beans for pillows
backaches for sleep

It's Typhoon Season

No windows
shopping under streets

It's Typhoon Season

Stolen soy sauce kisses
everyone knows

It's Typhoon Season

Buddha's head is served
with tea

It's Typhoon Season

Ame, amai, ame, amai, ame

It's Typhoon Season

note to the reader

ame- rain

amai- sweet like candy

Part V

Hunting the Holy

the distance of two strangers
has more potential
than the distance of lovers

every city I walk
holds more wonder
more riches
than past streets
I've stumbled through

Lusting for the extraordinary
building
brick or
stone
that I'm sure to recognize
from a dream

I cling
not wanting to believe
that every city is the same
hunting out holiness
hoping to find belonging
in newness
trying to place myself
in every stranger's arms

Killing Desdemona

Every so often I find home
and I walk between wanting
to stay forever
or to run away
in a pulse I could be content
yet I manage
to find my Othello
letting Iago
convince me of flaws
in my happiness

I sit
waiting to drop
my Russian Imperial Egg
trusting nothing to be that
beautiful
doubting my own pleasure

too often
I've thrown out the apple
with one rotten spot
given away the sturdy chair
with a minute scratch
I'm asking
if anyone has ever been content
if we believe in its existence
outside of lies
we tell ourselves
resting next to lovers
that like ourselves
we have failed to get to know

Street Talk

Reunions of streets
never before seen
by the eye that hides
so blatantly behind
each of our bodies
in the center of our backs
watching for stones
we might have already
stumbled over
seconds ago
just to point and say
I knew all along
of the dangers this new
place held

the eye whispers of the fears
you didn't listen to
and caution
you should have clung to
but the eye would not
be happy staring
at a never changing wall
of gray

I'm always hearing the eye saying
you should have settled back there
followed by what's next

Transition

After traveling for days, weeks, months
I wonder
if transition can become a location
is movement my existence

There are things to do
at home
but the picture of home
is lost
I'm no longer sure if I'm
trying to return
or trying to find
where I am supposed to be

slowly I become homesick for
comfort you can't find alone
locations become people
home is something
to be missed
like casual conversations over tea
and late night confessions over wine

I'm not sure when I'll stop moving
or if I'll find home sitting still

maybe home is like marriage
something that exists long
before it's ever named

I've known you from before

You were on a corner in Stockholm
you asked me for change
hand extended as you sat
begging or meditating
it was hard to tell which

now you're helping me
with my car door in Accra
and I know I've seen you before

yesterday leaning on a post marked Angel Station
you asked for the nearest phone booth
feet crammed into heels your skirt was too short

Here in Accra you're in a Star tee-shirt
I know I've seen you

in San Francisco or L.A.
Santa Monica or Bombay
huddled near some shrubbery
eyes that penetrate
always ask the same question:

there is something more, right?

We search the passing faces
get caught on strangers'
jaw lines
hunting to discover
if this could be it

Mornings

Some days when the dew catches
the morning sun just right, making
me think that fairies have placed small
glass globes on the earth as visual gifts for us all,
I get scared.

Scared, because everything
seems so right, or maybe
perfect
and I don't have a reason for it to be.
I pray then
to what I do not know
that this calm is not the left over
disaster from somewhere else.

When birds can hum and tea can warm
my lips, when I can stand outside in
the morning gray, I discover time
to question being.
I can't understand how the air
has become soft. How it can press itself up against my cheek
like a feather pillow—barely there.
So I pause in this wonder and pray
hoping someone else is not being smothered
by this same air.

After a cold night, I melt the morning's
new snow off the banister with my coffee cup.
Earth makes no sound,
hibernating under her blanket.
I wait for the phone call,
I don't expect to come.
The one with "she was hurt or
he died."

Maybe I'm afraid that too much
right will only equal something wrong.
Perhaps mornings that
hold me tight and fill a small hole

with nature's touch, open up new
holes with too much love.

sun rises and soil heats
I wait for:
the next disaster to hit
the next person to fail. Each time creating
ways to handle any situation in my head.
Until I even know how to escape attacks
by mobs with dogs during tornados
yet I know, no matter what I imagine in my head
I will be
still unprepared.
I wonder if clouds ever see it coming; if they
ever really know that they are about to
erupt and spew all their beings down onto the
earth?

At night or on trains and buses I think
of what I would do if my world fell apart.
If mornings never came,
Too scared
to think of not being...
strong enough to make it through the day.

Then morning finds me in
a comforting breeze. And not staying to see
tomorrow's encore is no longer an option.
Sometimes I don't
have to be the bird frantic over her
young caught by the
neighborhood black snake
diving in to become the next meal
Right now the idea of doing nothing
sounds better than not doing at all

Fresh Orange Juice

Foreign dreams can't be that bad
is escape too hard to grasp
when you love a place
you are running from

an affair with the new?
masturbation over what could be
instead of intercourse with what is

after all
to flirt with danger
is only to revisit the birth
that wet and teased your tongue
built the hunger
for the roll of tangy navel
on your lips

knowing that we are staying
makes us stop sucking
stop discovering
the flavors
that are sitting
on our tongues

the taste of fresh orange
squeezed between the teeth
is only enjoyed when we know
we'll soon run out
forever is not something
we want to stick in our mouths



